

Conference report

IWIPS Workshop discusses Internationalisation of Products and Systems

7–9 July 2005, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Everyone talks about globalisation these days. Worldwide cooperation has become reality particularly within the information technology industry. Products are often designed and programmed by teams spread around the globe. Information systems need to be usable in many countries and especially web sites are accessible from all over the world and often need to offer multilingual content or need to provide a user interface in various languages.

In many cases, the adaptation needs to go beyond language. For e-commerce systems, it is vital that buyers can enter their address in the format that they are used to. Apart from these obvious and visible aspects of nations and cultures, there are also different values which can lead to the so-called culture shock for visitors. Such values and traditions have developed as answers to basic questions on how to deal with the world. Among them are the strength of group identity vs. individualism, perception of time, a balance between masculine and feminine values and the level of acceptance of uncertainty. These cultural differences also have a great impact on information services and systems. Systems need to be adapted. This adaptation to language and culture is often referred to as localisation.

The IWIPS workshop series (International Workshop on Internationalisation of Products and Systems) deals with the problems involved with globalisation from several perspectives. IWIPS integrates the perspective on language and the user interface. The high number of visitors from industry proves the relevance of the topic.

From July 7th to 9th 2005, the sixth workshop was held in Amsterdam. Three invited presentations set the framework for the program. First, the pioneer in the analysis of intercultural differences, Geert Hofstede, talked about “recent consequences of culture”. He gave an overview of his work from the famous study at IBM in the seventies to recent empirical work. Hofstede pointed out that wealth needs to be eliminated as a factor in research about culture and that it is also important to set the borderline between personality and culture research. Among the correlations he mentioned was one between whiskey consumption and masculinity of a culture and average walking speed and short-term orientation.

The second invited speaker was Anne Kirah is an anthropologist at Microsoft. She gave practical advice on how to involve opponents within developer teams into anthropological approaches. Kirah provided some insight on how visiting people at their homes and observing them as well as asking them for their visions helped to improve products. Pursuing that approach, she found reasons why Instant Messenger was not successful in Japan, for instance. People felt it difficult to end online communication due to the Japanese politeness conventions.

Patrick Jordan from the Current Trend Institute, the third invited presenter moved toward the topic of the second day, which was tangible objects. He talked about the pleasure of using products and gave many examples for international markets. He elaborated, for example, that strollers for children need to be designed differently in different cultures where men are allowed or expected to take care of children.

The papers selected by peer-review dealt with many different information services and applied a variety of methods. Lydia Oshlyansky presented a study on preferences for mobile phone designs comparing Korean and British users. Two different empirical studies showed which components and functions are preferred by which group. Maged Ali showed empirical results from a study on trust in e-commerce for Egyptian users. He compared trust for two e-commerce sites for books and tried to identify the relationship between trust, attitude and willingness to buy. José Abdelnour-Nocera talked about a new approach to define and assess usefulness in international settings. Thomas Mandl presented a study assessing quality criteria in Peru and Germany. Rüdiger Heimgärtner dealt with driver assistance systems in intercultural settings. He intends to adapt the parameters of the system either to German or to Chinese drivers. Long Liu gave an interesting overview on the localization of medical hardware and classified the problems arising when products are exported from Europe to Asia.

Some presentations were about household products. Jan Carel Diehl and Daan van Eijk gave an overview on their design work which included ideas on a version of a refrigerator for rural India. Cooking is usually done while sitting on the floor and their design is usable in such a situation. Johanna Hariandja and Brechtje Daams described their empirical study of the utility and usability of a food processor. They compared how a Western product can be evaluated in Holland and Indonesia.

In the young researcher track, four presentations of work in progress were shown. Femke de Wit created different versions of one well designed web site optimized for certain groups of cultures. Marjolein Kortemann analyzed cultural factors for technology acceptance. Rilla Khaled presented a research agenda for analyzing persuasive technology in New Zealand, a multi-cultural society. Anett Kralisch talked about the influence of language and culture on the information flow in virtual communities. Her approach combines log-file analysis and social network analysis.

The next IWIPS Workshop will be held in July 2006 in Lawrence, Kansas. Hopefully, many research papers and continuing interest from industrial partners will guarantee another successful workshop.

Further information like abstracts of articles and an address for ordering the proceedings series (Designing for Global Markets) can be found at <http://iwips.org>.

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